

Radiological Health Program

Guidance on the Response to Radiological Terrorist Threats Issued July 2, 2002

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is tasked to provide technical assistance to the Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) for incidents involving radiological incidents or terrorist threats involving a radiological component. Refer to the Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan: Radiological Emergency Response Volume 3, and Terrorism Consequence Management Volume 8 for task assignments and overview of the state's response. In addition the **Code of Virginia** Section 32.1-229 authorizes the Board of Health to develop programs for responding to radiation emergencies and coordinate such programs with VDEM. Local governments and State agencies may request technical assistance or training through VDEM Technical Hazards Division at (804) 897-6500 Extension 6569.

Concerned employers should provide their employees and receptionists a procedure to handle telephone threats including a radiological threat. An example follows:

How To Respond to a "Dirty Bomb" Incident or Threat

Threats

Anyone who receives a threat involving either a bomb or dirty bomb should follow the facility's bomb threat procedures. The procedure should contain the following elements:

- If possible let someone else know of the threat, while obtaining as much information over the telephone from the terrorist. If the threat is received by other means, immediately contact local law enforcement authorities.
- Try to determine where the bomb is located, time its set to go off, information about the bomb and person.
- After contact is broken, immediately contact the local 911 emergency services number and ask for police assistance and provide information requested.

Explosion

A "dirty bomb" incident will appear as a conventional explosion and will initially produce the same effects, such as trauma from flying debris. The scope of damage will be identical to a conventional explosion and will be dependent on the type and quantities of explosives, and placement. However a "dirty bomb" could have a significant psychological impact, by causing fear, panic and disruption. In case of injury, medical treatment has priority over radiological concerns. Emergency responders have been trained to consider other hazards (biological, chemical, and radioactive) associated with explosions of unknown origin. The response to a "dirty bomb" threat should be treated the same as any other bomb threat.

Once a "dirty bomb" has exploded, or there is an explosion of unknown origin. The following actions may occur.

- Contact the local 911 emergency services number and ask for assistance. Provide information regarding the incident: your location, location of explosion and nature of explosion if known, any known injuries, and damage.

- The local fire department will be the initial responders. Once the incident is determined to be a terrorist incident, the local law enforcement authorities should contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Crisis Management Phase).
- If the local Fire Chief or emergency management officials require additional assistance to respond to the emergency, then the locality may implement regional mutual assistance agreements, such as the use of regional Tech Hazmat Teams. The locality also may request state assistance through the VDEM State Emergency Operations Center (804) 674-2400 or 1-800-468-8992.
- VDEM will task the appropriate state agencies to provide assistance. For example the VDH is tasked to provide technical assistance for incidents involving radiological incidents or terrorist threats involving a radiological component. Refer to the *Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan: Radiological Emergency Response Volume 3, and Terrorism Consequence Management Volume 8* for task assignments and overview of the state's response. VDEM may deploy an on scene coordinator to direct the use of state resources. Usually this is accompanied by a declaration of an emergency by the Governor.
- VDH may provide technical assistance and on site field monitoring and assessment to support VDEM. In addition to portable field equipment, VDH also has mobile radiation laboratory capabilities. VDH may also directly request federal assistance from the US Department of Energy (DOE) Regional Office. Assistance may include: augmenting field monitoring, providing aerial monitoring of the accident site, or providing atmospheric modeling. The DOE may on its initiative recommend activation of the Federal Emergency Radiological Plan for the Consequence Management Phase. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is the lead federal agency for the Consequent Management Phase of the response.

Note: Citizens should be aware that certain facilities such as nuclear power plants and certain other nuclear facilities are required by their operating license to have a security force and established procedures to address security threats. In all cases security measures at these facilities have been augmented since September 11, 2001 and threat assessments are periodically conducted by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

References:

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has an excellent web page that describes "dirty bomb"
<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/dirty-bombs.html>

For more information on terrorism response in general the Federal Emergency Management Agency has an excellent self-study course entitled: Q-534: Emergency Response to Terrorism (presented by the National Fire Academy-10 hours)
<http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/crslist.htm>

Authority: *Code of Virginia* §32.1-229.

Disclaimer: This guidance is not a substitute for a complete review of local and state emergency plans. A facility's procedures will be dependant on their individual risk factors, resources and established relationships or agreements with local authorities.

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